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ABSTRACT

This document describes, in question and answer format, the Credential Award System through which the Child Development Associate (CDA) Consortium regulates assessment of child care personnel who apply for the CDA credential. A private, non-profit organization of national professional associations, the CDA Consortium was founded in 1972 with the aim of developing a system for (1) assessing the competence of individuals working with 3- to 5-year olds in early childhood centers and (2) awarding the CDA credential to persons assessed as competent. This system covers personnel in nursery schools, parent-child cooperatives, day care centers, Head Start programs and other center-based programs. After minimal eligibility requirements have been satisfied, a candidate is evaluated in six areas of competence in working with children: (1) establishment and maintenance of a safe and healthy learning environment, (2) advancement of physical and intellectual competence, (3) support of a positive self-image and individual strength, (4) promotion of harmonious interrelation between children and adults in a group environment, (5) development of good coordination between home and center with regard to child-rearing practices and expectations, and (6) ability to carry out supplementary responsibilities related to children's programs. Members of a Local Assessment Team -- consisting of the candidate, a trainer, a parent-community representative and a Consortium representative -- collect information on the candidate's performance, coordinate their judgments according to the Consortium's competence standards list, and determine whether the candidate should be awarded a credential. (BF)

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This document presents a summary of a unique entity: The Child Development Associate (CDA) Consortium's Credential Award System - the system by which the Consortium regulates the assessments of child-care personnel who apply for the CDA credential.

The answers to the series of questions that follow, though concise, should give professionals and practitioners, as well as other interested persons, a basic understanding of how the Consortium goes about evaluating the performance of individuals who work in center-based programs for three- to five-year-olds.

By means of its innovative and inclusive approach, the CDA Consortium aims both to recognize and to develop a cadre of professionals, whose competent performance will contribute to better care for young children.

Additional information about the Consortium's program and Enrollment Forms for the CDA credential may be obtained by writing to:

Dr. Evangeline H. Ward, Executive Director
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# THE CHILD DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATE

# CREDENTIAL

# AND THE

# CREDENTIAL AWARD SYSTEM

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From the Office of Child Development,
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## Who is a CDA?

A CDA is a Child Development Associate, a person who works with children, aged three to five, in a child-development center. The individual has been awarded the CDA credential after satisfactorily demonstrating competence in his or her performance with children.

## What does a CDA do?

A CDA takes primary responsibility for a group of children in a center and is able to meet the specific needs of these children - by fostering their physical, social, emotional and intellectual growth; by setting up and maintaining a healthy child-care environment; and by establishing a good relationship between the children's parents and the child-development center.

## Where do CDAs work?

CDAs work in a variety of places and programs - nursery schools, parent/child cooperatives, day-care centers, Head Start programs, etc. The one common thread is that CDAs work with three- to five-year-old children in centers.

## When can someone become a CDA?

An individual can become a CDA when he or she is able to: (1) meet the CDA Consortium's eligibility requirements; and (2) demonstrate the Consortium's standards of competence.

To be eligible for candidacy for the credential, one must:

- Be at least 16 years old;
- Know of a center where he or she can be observed working with children;
- Have had at least eight consecutive months of full-time experience or 16 consecutive months of part-time (less than three days a week) experience working with three- to five-year-old children in a group setting, and with their parents.
- Have had either some formal training (in a university, college, junior college or high school) or some informal training (in workshops, seminars or in-service programs) in early childhood education/child development.

At the heart of the Consortium's Competency Standards are the six "competency areas"; individuals must be able to demonstrate these competencies during assessment. The six are:

- Establishment and maintenance of a safe and healthy learning environment;
- Advancement of physical and intellectual competence;
- Support of a positive self-image and individual strength;
- Promotion of harmonious interrelation between children and adults in a group environment;
- Developmen of good coordination between home and center with regard to child-rearing practices and expectations; and
- Ability to carry out supplementary responsibilities related to children's programs.

By what means is the potential CDA assessed?

The process developed by the CDA Consortium for assessing the competence of child-care workers is considerably different from assessment systems used by most other credentialing agencies.

The Consortium's assessment process features four distinctive elements. The assessment of a candidate for the CDA credential is:

1. A Team Assessment: The assessment is conducted by a team of persons, called the Local Assessment Team (LAT). Each of the four members of the team views the Candidate from a different perspective. The LAT members are the Candidate, the Trainer, the Parent-Community Representative, and the Consortium Representative.

2. A Performance-Based Assessment: Each LAT member collects information on the Candidate's performance by observing the Candidate working with children, staff and parents. To collect this information, the team employs a variety of instruments, including a survey of the parents of the children in the Candidate's group.

3. A Judgment-Referenced Assessment: This means that the Consortium relies on the coordinated human judgment of the LAT for its assessment of a candidate's competence. As a "compass" for the LAT members' observations and judgments, the Consortium provides each with a copy of its

Competency Standards, which lists the kinds of qualities and abilities that a competent child-care worker should possess.

4. A Verified Assessment: To ensure the integrity and quality of assessments, the Consortium insists that every LAT adhere strictly to Consortium regulations. It is the responsibility of the Consortium Representative to verify whether or not the specific Local Assessment Team did, in fact, observe all the regulations. Without this verification, the Consortium will not recognize any recommendations of a LAT.

How can I get a CDA credential and become a Child Development Associate?

In order to get a CDA credential, an individual must complete an Enrollment Form and mail it to the CDA Consortium. (For Enrollment Forms, write to: The Child Development Associate Consortium, 7315 Wisconsin Avenue, Suite 601E, Washington, D. C., 20014.) Individuals who meet the eligibility requirements begin the process through the Consortium's Credential Award System.

## The Credential Award System

The Credential Award System (CAS) provides for all necessary contacts, communications, evaluations and activities required of a person seeking the CDA credential. It is designed only for individual assessments.

What are the major steps of the Credential Award System?

There are six stages in the process. In summary, they are:

1. Pre-Entry Process: In this phase, the Consortium provides information about the CDA credential to any person, institution, or agency requesting it. Any interested individual may submit an Enrollment Form to the Consortium. If eligible, that individual is sent an application package by the Consortium.

2. Intake and Initial Assessment Activity: In this phase, the Consortium receives application materials from potential candidates. If the applicant meets eligibility requirements, the application is accepted and checked, and the individual becomes a CDA Candidate. The CDA Candidate is then given instructions on how to

proceed - including how to select two members of the Local Assessment Team (LAT). The two team members begin collecting assessment data about the CDA Candidate.

3. Candidate Readiness: When LAT members have completed their assignments, they notify the Consortium. The Consortium then assigns the fourth member to the Local Assessment Team, the Consortium Representative.

4. Team Assessment: In this phase, the CDA Consortium Representative observes and interviews the Candidate. Then the entire assessment team meets to study and discuss the collected materials about the Candidate. The meeting concludes with a recommendation to the CDA Consortium either to award or to deny the credential.

5. Award: The Consortium reviews the Local Assessment Team recommendation and examines the assessment materials. If the LAT recommends awarding the credential, and the materials are properly completed, and if there is verification that the procedures have been followed, the Consortium ratifies the LAT's recommendation and awards the CDA credential. If the LAT recommendation is to deny the credential, the Consortium formally notifies the Candidate of the denial.

6. Post-Award Activity: Follow-up activities in this phase include the recording of credentialed CDAs on an official roster.

## The Candidate

### What are the Candidate's responsibilities in assessment?

The Candidate has the major responsibility in assessment. Not only does he or she participate in the assessment as a member of the Local Assessment Team, but also the Candidate chooses two of the other three LAT members, makes sure that all forms are prepared and submitted, decides the general time period for the assessment and decides when he or she is "ready" for assessment.

The Candidate's responsibilities begin upon receipt of the application materials. The duties can be summarized in six steps:

1. Complete application form;

2. Prepare a Portfolio intended to demonstrate performance in child-care work;

3. Contact and coordinate with the Trainer and Parent-Community Representative;

4. Notify the CDA Consortium that all assessment information has been collected;

5. Cooperate with the Consortium Representative, who is assigned after the Candidate has indicated readiness for final assessment (step 4);

6. Prepare for and participate in the Local Assessment Team meeting.

What is the Candidate's role on the Local Assessment Team?

One of the Candidate's major responsibilities is to compile a Portfolio, a device for bringing his or her own point of view to the assessment. The Portfolio should be a collection of materials that demonstrate how the Candidate performs and how his or her performance relates to the Competency Standards.

Materials included in a Portfolio are supposed to be accompanied by a written explanation of why they are included and how they demonstrate what the Candidate does with children. The Portfolio should give other LAT members a complete and accurate picture of the Candidate's work with young children. It is brought to the LAT meeting, studied by other LAT members and used in team discussions and decisions.

Guidelines for developing the Portfolio are contained in materials sent to the Candidate along with the Application Form.

## The Trainer

Who can serve as the Candidate's Trainer?

The Trainer must be selected by the CDA Candidate, in order to serve on the Candidate's Local Assessment Team.

The Trainer is on the assessment team to provide a professional and historical perspective to the assessment of the Candidate's performance. The eligibility requirements for the position are the following:

1. Awareness of the professional growth of the Candidate;

2. Knowledge of the Candidate for a length of time;

3. A professional standing in the field of early childhood education/child development;

4. Familiarity with requirements governing preschool programs in the Candidate's region;

5. No present involvement in the same room with the Candidate.

What is the Trainer's role on the Local Assessment Team?

The Trainer contributes to the Candidate's assessment by completing the Trainer's Report on Candidate Form and by participating in the LAT meeting. The Trainer can also be of help to the Candidate in preparing the Portfolio and can give suggestions to the Candidate and generally serve as a sounding board for the Candidate's ideas and problems.

The Trainer's report is based on observation of the Candidate working with children and on the Trainer's knowledge of the Candidate and his or her past experiences and education.

## The Parent-Community Representative

Who can serve as the Parent-Community Representative?

The Parent-Community Representative (P-C Rep) must be selected by the Candidate, in order to serve on the Candidate's assessment team.

The P-C Rep is the person authorized to speak both for parents of the children in the Candidate's room and for the community.

To be eligible to be a P-C Rep, a person:

1. Must be a parent or legal guardian of a young child;

2. Must have been directly involved, within the past two years, as a parent or volunteer, with the center where the Candidate works;

3. Must not be presently employed by the center where the Candidate works;

4. Must not have a child in the Candidate's room at the present time;

5. Must be willing to collect information from parents of the children in the Candidate's room;

6. Must be willing to observe the Candidate's performance with the children and record observations; and

7. Must be willing to serve as a spokesperson for the parents and the community.

What does the Parent-Community Representative have to do?

The P-C Rep has four major responsibilities:

1. Survey the parents of the children in the Candidate's room using the Parent Opinion Questionnaires, which elicit the views of the parents on the Candidate's performance as it relates to their child/children. The P-C Rep helps parents fill out the questionnaire, when necessary, and collects the completed questionnaires.

2. Summarize individual parents' questionnaires on a Master Parent Opinion Questionnaire;

3. Make a visit to the Candidate's room, observe the Candidate working directly with children, and record observations on the proper form; and

4. Participate in the LAT meeting when it is scheduled.

How does the Candidate go about selecting a Parent-Community Representative and Trainer for the assessment team?

The Candidate asks her/his center director to nominate three persons who meet the qualifications of a Parent-Community Representative (P-C Rep) (see above) and must select his P-C Rep from among these.

The Candidate must select as Trainer a person who meets the qualifications of a Trainer (see above).

## The CDA Consortium Representative

When does the fourth member - the CDA Consortium Representative - join the assessment team?

When the Candidate, the Trainer and the P-C Rep have collected the necessary information, all three must sign a Readiness Notification Form,

which the Candidate sends, along with a $15 assessment fee, to the Consortium. When the Consortium receives the Readiness Notification Form, it assigns a Consortium Representative to join the Candidate's LAT.

Why is the Consortium Representative on the team - and what are the qualifications?

The Consortium Representative brings an independent, outside perspective to the LAT. She or he knows all the requirements established by the Consortium governing the Credential Award System and has both training and experience in the early childhood field.

The Consortium Representative must meet the following eligibility requirements:

1. Experience in center-based programs for children, three-to-five years old;

2. Academic training in early childhood education/child development;

3. Successful completion of a special, intensive training course sponsored by the Consortium. The course stresses interpersonal relations, observation skills, interview skills, LAT meeting procedures and the regulations of the Credential Award System.

What are the duties of a Consortium Representative?

Once assigned to a LAT, the Consortium Representative contacts all LAT members, arranges dates to observe and interview the CDA Candidate, schedules and participates in the LAT meeting, and mails all LAT materials to the Consortium. In addition, the Consortium Representative must verify to the Consortium that the LAT has properly followed all procedures.

## The Local Assessment Team Meeting

What is the purpose of the Local Assessment Team (LAT) Meeting?

The LAT meeting is the heart of the CDA Consortium's Credential Award System. The meeting is held after all four members collect the necessary assessment data. At this meeting, the four individuals comprising the LAT must make a decision, which becomes their recommendation to the Consortium that:

the Candidate is competent and should be awarded the CDA credential;

OR

the Candidate needs more training and is not recommended for the CDA credential at this time.

Besides making this decision, the LAT must complete a Profile of the Candidate, which highlights the areas of strength and areas of weakness, while also giving the Candidate specific suggestions for improvement.

What are the guidelines for the Local Assessment Team meeting?

The principles governing the LAT meeting are the following:

1. Peer Relationship: The Consortium expects LAT members to function as peers during the meeting. This means that all team members are equally important, have an equal right to speak and have an equal vote in all decisions.

2. Reviewability of Information: All information on the Candidate's performance must be reviewable. This means that it must be legible, clear and complete. If, during the meeting, a LAT member thinks of some additional important information about the Candidate, this information must be written in a reviewable manner and introduced into the meeting.

3. Interpretation of the Competency Standards: The Competency Standards given to the LAT by the Consortium are national standards. The LAT interprets these standards in light of the local situation in which the Candidate is working before applying the standards to the Candidate's performance.

4. Consensus Seeking: The Consortium expects LAT members, through sharing and discussing information, to attempt to reach complete agreement or consensus in their judgments of the CDA Candidate. If consensus cannot be reached, it will be reflected in individual votes. As for the final recommendation of the LAT, a favorable vote of 4-0 or 3-1 is considered by the Consortium to be sufficient for awarding the credential.

5. Documentation: After every vote, each member must document the decision made, by citing the supporting evidence and

the reasoning behind the decision. The evidence must be part of the information already presented to the team. The reasoning should include an indication of how the evidence relates to the Competency Standards.

6. Verification of Process: The Consortium has established strict procedures to be followed by LATs during assessments, and the Consortium Representative must verify that all procedures were observed. The Consortium will not recognize any LAT recommendations where procedures were violated.

What procedures are followed?

The Consortium provides a set of procedures for conducting the LAT meeting. These include explanation of all the collected information, verification of the meeting process, the final decision and completion of the Candidate's Profile.

Each team member participates in each step of the LAT meeting, and makes his or her decision on the total body of information gathered, reviewed and evaluated at the meeting. Team members are expected to express their opinions honestly and openly.

After the meeting, the Consortium Representative sends the Profile - with the LAT's recommendations - and other assessment materials to the Consortium's offices in Washington, D. C.

Consortium officials review the materials and one of the following happens:

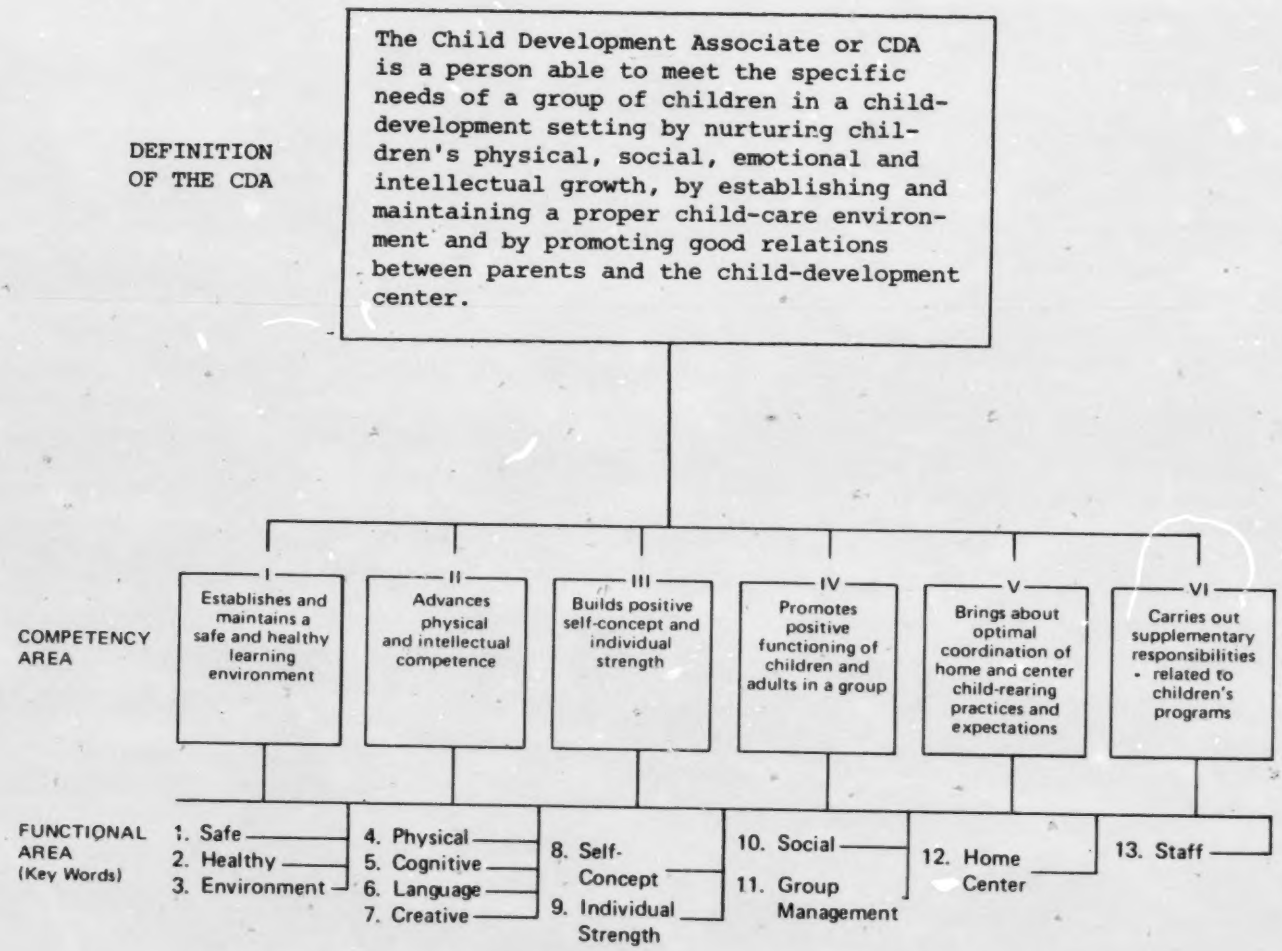
1. If the LAT recommends that the Candidate receive the credential and the Consortium Representative has verified the process, the Consortium awards the CDA credential.

2. If the LAT recommends that the Candidate receive more training, the Consortium notifies the Candidate that the credential cannot be awarded at this time. The Candidate may reapply later.

3. If the LAT recommends that the Candidate receive more training and the Candidate appeals that decision, in writing, the Consortium will refer the Candidate's assessment to its Credential Review Committee.

4. If the Consortium Representative fails to verify that all CDA Consortium procedures have been followed during the assessment, no credential can be awarded.

## Diagram of Competency Structure


DEFINITION OF THE CDA
The Child Development Associate or CDA is a person able to meet the specific needs of a group of children in a child-development setting by nurturing children's physical, social, emotional and intellectual growth, by establishing and maintaining a proper child-care environment and by promoting good relations between parents and the child-development center.
COMPETENCY AREA
I Establishes and maintains a safe and healthy learning environment
II Advances physical and intellectual competence
III Builds positive self-concept and individual strength
IV Promotes positive functioning of children and adults in a group
V Brings about optimal coordination of home and center child-rearing practices and expectations
VI Carries out supplementary responsibilities related to children's programs
FUNCTIONAL AREA (Key Words)
1. Safe
2. Healthy
3. Environment
4. Physical
5. Cognitive
6. Language
7. Creative
8. Self-Concept
9. Individual Strength
10. Social
11. Group Management
12. Home Center
13. Staff

## The CDA Consortium

### Who awards the CDA credential?

The Child Development Associate Consortium awards the CDA credential. The CDA Consortium is a private, non-profit corporation, headquartered in Washington, D. C. Established as an organization of national professional associations, the Consortium's concern is quality staff in child-development centers for children, aged three to five. Now totaling 39 national associations, the Consortium mechanism gives these various professionals an opportunity to work together to address this concern.

Two major tasks faced the CDA Consortium at its inception in 1972: (1) to develop a performance-based system for assessing the competence of individuals working with three- to five-year-old children in early childhood centers; and (2) to develop a system for awarding a Child Development Associate credential to persons assessed as competent.

Based on these objectives, the Consortium received its first funds on July 1, 1972, from the Office of Child Development (OCD), U. S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare. This action came as a result of a feasibility study and recommendations of a task force commissioned by OCD in 1971.

Basic developmental work on the assessment process and the Credential Award System reached a milestone on March 27, 1975, when the Consortium Board of Directors voted to begin awarding CDA credentials to individuals who were assessed as competent according to Consortium standards. In July, 1975, the first CDA credentials were awarded.